

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, California 92011  
Phone: 760/431-9440  
Fax: 760/431-9624

# News Release



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(SC)

05-091

Contact: Jane Hendron, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office – 760/431-9440 ext. 205

For Release: September 27, 2005

## **DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF CONSERVATION ACTIONS TO PROTECT COACHELLA VALLEY MILK-VETCH RELEASED**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the conservation of the Coachella Valley milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae*), and its proposed critical habitat, at \$7.8 million over the next 20 years. The Service will accept public comments on both documents until October 27, 2005.

The Coachella Valley milk-vetch is protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as an endangered species. On December 14, 2004, the Service proposed 3,583 acres as critical habitat for the plant in three units in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, California.

“Critical habitat” is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. Critical habitat has no regulatory impact on private landowners taking actions on their land, unless they are doing something that involves Federal funding or permits.

Of 20,559 acres identified as containing features essential to the conservation of the species, approximately 16,976 are excluded from the proposed critical habitat designation because they are covered under the pending Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan in Riverside County under section 4(b)(2) of the ESA.

Virtually all of the land proposed as critical habitat is federally managed, including areas that support populations of the plant and its sand habitat that are managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits

of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species.

The draft economic analysis considers the potential effects of conserving the Coachella Valley milk-vetch, including protective measures taken due to Federal, State, and local laws that aid habitat conservation for the species in essential habitat areas.

The proposed critical habitat for the Coachella Valley milk-vetch was intended to include only Federal and State lands. However, due to current mapping processes, some acres associated with private lands were inadvertently included in the description of the proposed critical habitat units. Because the draft economic analysis looks at the costs associated with the all of the acreage included in the proposed rule, the development costs on private lands were included. If this proposed critical habitat designation is made final, the Service intends to explicitly remove the private lands in the final determination.

The range of Coachella Valley milk-vetch is limited to the area from just east of Cabazon to north and west of Indio, with additional limited occurrences in the Chuckwalla Valley along a 5-mile stretch of Highway 177 north of Desert Center.

Within its geographic range, Coachella Valley milk-vetch is found in loose, wind-blown (eolian) sand hummocks and flats, and in sandy alluvial washes. The sands that flow into and across the Coachella Valley originate from drainage basins in the San Bernardino, Little San Bernardino, and San Jacinto Mountains; and the Indio Hills. Sand is transported into the Coachella Valley by wind and water during rainfall events.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

Comments on the proposed rule and/or the draft economic analysis will be accepted until October 27, 2005 and can be submitted in writing to: Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011. Comments may also be faxed to 760-431-9624, or sent by e-mail to [fwlcfwocvmv@fws.gov](mailto:fwlcfwocvmv@fws.gov). Copies of the proposed rule and the draft economic analysis can be accessed on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760-431-9440.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which

encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.

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